INTRODUCTION

You know, I am certain, how important ~~this occasion is for me~~ it is for - an American Presbyterian ~~with~~ by the name of Buchanan, ~~I remember when in the summer of 1977 and again in 1978 and I visited the Cathedral in Kiev with a group of young people from Columbus, Ohio. It was the first~~ to be in the birth-place of the religious tradition which nurtured me, and which I love and gladly serve. ~~And~~ I am thrilled and humbled to be in this pulpit this morning, and I thank you for the privilege.

I bring greetings from the Session and Congregation of Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago. ~~Fourth Church is a large urban church,~~ situatyed, much like this one, ~~in~~ the busiest thoroughfare in the ~~busiest~~ dstrict of our city. Our nearest neighbors are skyscrapers of 67 and 70 and 90 stories on three sides. and this Sunday morning Mr. Macmillan will preach to a full sanctuary of members, tourists and visitors.

~~I have asked the congregation to be thinking of us this morning. And I ask you to remember them and Mr. Macmillan in your prayers as well.~~

My sermon is - out at 8:20

(8:30) In the Breaking of Bread - and my text is Luke 24:30: "When Jesus was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them." and their eyes were opened + they recognized him.

(11:00) Falling in Love with Jesus - my text is John 21:17: "He said to him... 'Do you love me?' Peter...said 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.'"

IN THE BREAKING OF BREAD

April 2, 1989

8:30 a.m. Worship Service

John M. Buchanan

St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh

Scripture
Luke 24:13-31

"When Jesus was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them." -Luke 24:30 (RSV)

This, I submit, is the most important Sunday of the year.

By way of introducing that proposal, let me read a page out of a wonderful first novel, popular recently in the United States, by Southern journalist, Olive Ann Burns. The title of the novel is Cold Sassy Tree. That's the name of the fictional rural Georgia town, deep in the American South at the beginning of this century which is the setting. The intriguing characters include: Grandpa E. Rucker Blakeslee and his grandson, Will Tweedy. Grandpa Blakeslee has scandalized Cold Sassy Tree by marrying a

beautiful, young hatmaker, Miss Love Simpson, three weeks after his beloved wife of many years died.

That was not appropriate to call Scary Tree... and the town is very critical, people are gonna gossip, particularly at the small Meth. church.. So Grandpa + his new bride don't go on Sun. ...

~~Since his hasty and eyebrow raising marriage,~~ ~~[illegible]~~. ~~He and Miss~~ They have church at home instead. Here is how he describes it to Will Tweedy...

(better in a rich rural Southern accent..)

"We sang us some hymns, after which I talked to the Lord a while, tellin' Him about the week, and then I preached the sermon...

"I didn't have no words thought out, you know, so I jest commenced sayin' thangs I been a-thinkin' on lately - 'bout the Virgin Birth and Resurrection and all like thet. I said don't any a-them thangs matter."

Will Tweedy is stunned. "Gosh, Grandpa, you mean you don't think Jesus rose from the dead?"

Grandpa answers, "I'm a-sayin' thet did He or didn't He ain't important, son. What's important is thet when the spirit a-Jesus Christ come down on them disciples later, they quit settin' round a-moanin' and a-tremblin', and got to work. They

warn't scairt no more, and the words they spoke had fire in'im. Compared to a miracle like thet, Jesus rollin' back a dang rock and flyin' off to Heaven ain't nothin'." [p. 188]

That's pretty good theology. And that, it seems to me, is what those of us who come back to church the Sunday after Easter are left with.

It is my favorite Sunday. It is known in some quarters as "Low Sunday," a good day for the professional practitioners to take off and rest our weary bodies and cool down our over-heated spirits. ... It remains my favorite, however.

The problem, you see, is that when you celebrate as exuberantly as we did last week, you might come to the logical conclusion that Easter is about an event that happened two thousand years ago. Perhaps more important than the Trojan Wars or the assassination of Julius Caesar, but like them - history. The fact is that if we focus solely on the event of resurrection, pondering the

historicity of the accounts – what happened, where it happened and when it happened, and who said what to whom – we may have a lot of pondering to do. One thing we will not have done is to hear the Good News – or confront the theological [redacted] of Christianity.

What Easter is about is the stunning suggestion that God lives: that the Creator of all that is, lives among us. The Risen Christ is the power and love and justice and healing of the Creator God. God is not closeted in some corner of the universe, seated on a throne invisible above the clouds, or even in the complex formulas of philosophy and theology, but in the world, in the stuff of ordinary life. That's what all the shouting was about last Sunday.

There aren't many consistencies in the New Testament resurrection accounts. Each Gospel tells it differently. The one thing the accounts are consistent about is that the empty tomb didn't convince anybody. What convinced his friends that

absence of the body, - that they judged to be nonsense, Luke tells us.

he was alive was not the ~~empty tomb~~ but experiences - undeniable experiences of power and love and forgiveness and rebirth.

For two of them it happened in the most unlikely setting you could think of... on a road - the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

The story is wonderfully human. Do you remember how it was, after the funeral of someone you loved very much? How incongruous it seemed that life was still going on: buses were running, stores were open, people were moving about - as if nothing had happened. Didn't they know?

They had been hiding in that locked room for two days and nights and now, on the third day after the appalling disaster of Friday, two of them could stand it no longer. As the two walked they were joined by a third man. They told him about the events of the prior two days. They didn't know him, but they persuaded him to eat the evening meal with them at Emmaus. There - at table, breaking bread, in an act reminiscent of a supper they had

shared a few nights before - they recognized him.

On this day, the word is that the power and relevance of Christianity is not in the memory of an event that happened 2,000 years ago - regardless of how precious that memory is, or regardless of the glory and power of the celebration. The essence of it is not history, but experience. Not then - but now.

Did you notice how those two at Emmaus had to see things differently in order to recognize him. A good working definition of religious conversion is learning to see things differently: learning to see the holy in the ordinary. Vincent VanGogh painted pictures full of spiritual power and mystery. None of them are about "religious" subjects, but olive trees and starry nights and sunflowers and iris... Sometimes to see something is to know it for the first time even though you've been thinking about it all your life. The passion and poignancy of Romeo and Juliet can be described, told in words, but when Juliet covers the dead body

(X) So the disciples had to see differently in order to recognize their traveling companion as the Christ. - so his followers have always had to learn to see more & better.. to see him in the ordinary - to see the Holy in a hungry child.. a thankless woman.. a needy man.

of her beloved and tries frantically to place his ~~limp~~ lifeless arms around her, people in the ballet audience weep. It is seeing truth. (X)

The essence of it is not memory or history, but experience. The ultimate criteria for religion - for sermons, beliefs, rituals, gestures - is a blunt question: "So What?" "Does it matter?" "Does it make a difference?" "Does it have anything to do with the life we actually live with the secular as well as the religious?"

And on this day the word is yes. God's love lives among us. Death itself does not defeat it. In the world, in the stuff of life, in the breaking of bread, there is heart-filling beauty and soul-stirring truth.

It is no accident I think, that Luke sets the good news of God's love beside occasions when people are eating and drinking together. I think he has done that - preserved this story for us, in fact - to suggest that the Risen Christ is present in the ordinary, daily activities and rituals of

our life. I think, in addition, he wanted to suggest that Christ is present particularly when we are hungry... physically and spiritually.

It is precisely when we know our need for truth, for clarity, for love, for acceptance, for encouragement - that the Risen Christ comes. It is, I think, only when we have been absolutely devasted by grief, when we stand in the darkest valley of the shadow of death that the familiar words - ("I am the resurrection + the life ~~[illegible] me~~") come alive. It is, I think, only when we know our guilt - that the power of forgiveness ~~comes alive~~ is real. It is, I think, only when we know emptiness and boredom and staleness - that the resurrected Christ appears... It is precisely when we are painfully aware of our hunger, that bread is broken and our eyes are opened and we recognize him.

(in the frantic rat race to work hard to earn more money to buy more things..)

(He says "Take my yoke upon you.. and I will give you rest")

There are actually two different ideas of communion in the Christian tradition. The first, and by far the most familiar theology of the sacrament focuses on the Last Supper.

"This is my body broken for you. Do this in memory of me." It is a memorial feast. The mood is somber.

There is another motif. Equally ancient. Equally important, theologically. It has its roots in this table at Emmaus, where the Risen Christ was present. When in the breaking of bread ("their eyes were opened and they recognized him.")

All year long, in our observances of communion we try to keep those ideas together. But mostly, and appropriately, we remember his death on our behalf.

Today - first Sunday of Eastertide - the mood is different. Christ is alive. You and I live in a new world.

God's love is there on the road to Emmaus and in the city streets and dirty alleys. God's passionate love for the world is there in the agony and ecstacy, the tragedy and the heroism of the human story. God's love lives in the ambiguity of the Middle East, and the tireless efforts of peace

makers. God's love is in Northern Ireland, a Chicago slum, your city and mine. ✕

God's love lives. Expect it. Anticipate the healing, life-giving love of God in the very stuff of your life.

That's what this Sunday is about. It is easily missed, actually. The two who walked to Emmaus with him almost didn't realize it. It was at table - to which he invites us - that "he took bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him."

Amen.

✕ and in your life - where you struggle, - dream, doubt, love + believe ... in your intimate relations - at your table where bread is broke + love shared + ~~dreams~~ + ~~expectations~~ etc celebrated .. life is celebrated.

stay put through Creed